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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/23/2017

TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL OSCE IR TU

SUBJECT: GOT ON IRANIAN ASYLUM SEEKER PEJMAN: UNLIKELY TO BE GRANTED REFUGEE STATUS

Classified By: Political Counselor Janice G. Weiner, reasons 1.4(b),(d)

1.(C) Summary: Refugees are a neuralgic issue for Turkey and particularly so when they involve high profile political activists from Iran. Normal hesitancy to deal with such cases is greatly increased in the current context of political turbulence and is likely to remain high until well after a new government is formed in the fall. As a result, the GOT is unwilling to grant refugee status to Iranian asylum seeker, Pejman Piran, despite our interventions with both the MFA and the Ministry of Interior. At the same time, he will not be deported back to Iran and is free to leave Turkey via Iraq (the country through which he originally entered Turkey.) End Summary.

2.(C) We have worked closely with UNHCR on the case of Pejman Piran, an Iranian asylum seeker who has been in Van, Turkey for approximately 12 months. While the UNHCR has deemed Pejman to be a refugee eligible for resettlement, the GOT has not granted him refugee status and is unwilling to approve his request for travel to Istanbul so that he can be interviewed by USG officials to determine his eligibility for resettlement in the U.S.

3.(C) Our discussions with MFA officials on this case were inconclusive, despite repeated interventions. Subsequently, the DCM called on the head of the Foreigners, Police at the Interior Ministry Terzioglu. Terzioglu was immediately familiar with the case and quite categorical in his response.

He said that Pejman did not meet the criteria for refugee status under the 1951 UN Convention. He had willingly returned to Iran after first coming to Turkey, invalidating his claim for asylum. Moreover, he indicated Pejman was a known political activist and many hundreds of Iranian dissidents were looking to follow his course.

4.(C) Terzioglu emphasized that UNHCR officers have access to Piran in Van, and insisted that the GOT does not want to see him persecuted in Iran. The Turkish police would not hand him over to Iranian authorities, he assured. Turkey is the only country that allows visa-free entry for Iranian citizens, specifically so that people fleeing persecution have somewhere to go. While he said Piran will not be deported from Turkey, he cannot stay forever. He noted that Piran was not limited to exiting Turkey by traveling to Iran.

He could also leave through Iraq, since he made a previous application at Harbur.

5.(C) Comment: Our recent experience with sensitive Iranian cases indicates that this will be a tough sell. Following the formation of a new government in the fall it may be possible to redress the issue of his refugee status. Short of that, Piran may wish travel to Iraq and process his refugee application from there or other neighboring countries. End comment.

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